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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISIGN OF A COMPOSITION PROGRAM

Stanley E. Legum and Stephen D. Krashen

The preparation and criticism of compositions make use of a conceptual network which is not always explicit.[1] In order to forward the design of a program for developing children's composition skills, a preliminary list of systemic concepts relating to compositions is presented and discussed. For purposes of presentation, the concepts are grouped (somewhat arbitrarily) into four categories which roughly correspond to one possible temporal sequence for preparing a composition:[2]

1. Conceptualization
2. Planning
3. Writing
4. Editing

The network is summarized in the appendix and elaborated in the text that follows.

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[1]We would like to thank David Bessemer and Edward Smith for numerous valuable suggestions and criticisms.

[2]There is a literature on rhetoric which deals with many of the concepts introduced in this paper. Although these concepts were developed independently of that literature, reference to such review articles as West (1971) or Gorrell (1971) will show that few surprises can be expected on examining it. Practically every matter these two articles touch on can be analyzed in terms of the concepts in this paper.

Rhetoricians distinguish their work from that of linguists and logicians by the fact that rhetoricians deal with units larger than the sentence and make value judgements about stylistic choices while linguists and logicians typically limit themselves to description of utterances of sentence length or smaller without making value judgements (Gorrell, 1971).

THE PREPARATION OF COMPOSITIONS

Category 1: Conceptualization. At least four important decisions must be made before the planning of a composition can proceed efficiently. It is necessary to determine the purpose, topic, audience and extent of coverage of a composition. These four factors are mutually interrelated and are crucial to other decisions about the form of the composition. Purposes are reasons for writing compositions (e.g., to inform, to describe). Although the topic is traditionally defined as the subject of a composition, a more useful description of the topic is the object of the purpose of the composition. When the purpose is a verb, the topic is the direct object of that verb. Nominalized forms of purpose and topic descriptions such as "An analysis of the spelling curriculum" may, for convenience sake, be called the scope of the composition they pertain to.

The range of possible purposes and topics for compositions is, of course, as large as the number of human motives and concerns. It may be useful for planning instruction in composition to attempt to classify purposes and topics into a few large classes. As a first approximation, the classes of purposes may be considered to be (1) social interchange, (2) recreation, (3) persuasion, and (4) recording. Some possible subclasses of these purposes are identified below.

1. Social interchange

   to thank

   to greet

   to announce

to sympathize

to invite

to accept

to acknowledge

to request

to promise[3]

2. Recreation

to humor

to sadden

self-expression

3. Persuasion

to advertise

to argue

to convince

to teach[3]

to threaten

4. Recording

to record

to plan

to analyze

to describe

to report

to teach[3]

to promise[3]

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[3]Some subclasses such as to teach and to promise fall in more than one class.

Not surprisingly, all of these classes and subclasses involve some degree of information transfer.

Each purpose subclass undoubtedly has certain topics that are commonly associated with it. What these are has not been investigated, and it is not currently known whether the classes of topics pattern in a parallel fashion to the classes of purposes or independently of them.

The designation of the audience is important, because many decisions depend on the nature of the assumptions one can reasonably make about the knowledge and prejudices the audience brings to the composition. In particular, in conceptualizing a composition it is important to ask whether the intended audience is appropriate given the topic and purpose; whether the topic is appropriate for the given audience; and whether the purpose is appropriate for the given audience and topic.

As a first approximation, four classes of audiences can be identified in terms of how well the audience and author know each other. Schematically, these may be represented in a two by two table:

TABLE 1

		Audience Knows Writer: well	poorly
Writer knows audience:	well	Class 1	Class 2
	poorly	Class 3	Class 4

Extent of coverage can be broken down into four related concepts: the dimensions to be covered (e.g., time, space, a person's life, a person's family, a person's pets, hobbies, ethnics, etc.), the relative

importance of each dimension chosen, the boundaries placed on each dimension, and the amount of detail to be covered for each dimension. The term dimension is here used in the sense of a range over which the composition extends. No concept of direction or linearity is necessarily attached to the concept dimension. Thus, in a composition on politics in Los Angeles County, one dimension might be the political subdivisions. Any convenient ordering of these subdivisions could be made in an exhaustive listing of them: they could be considered in alphabetic order or in geographic order starting in the northwestern corner of the county and moving inward in clockwise spirals. Arbitrary bounds could be placed on the poli ical subdivision dimension by limiting the study to incorporate areas of the county.

In a history of California, one would include both a time dimension and a geographic dimension. The time dimension would probably be given precedence over the geographic dimension and locations would be ordered within given periods of time, rather than each geographical area being considered separately with numerous subdivisions of the time dimension being made within the discussio.. for each.

For another example, consider a composition for which the topic is Ann and Bud's afternoon trip, the purpose is description or narrative, and the audience is a mutual friend of the writer, Ann and Bud. Possible dimensions to be covered are time, location (space), and activities. The time dimension would be explicitly bounded by noon and sunset, while the spatial and activity dimensions would be implicitly bounded by the time dimension. In this kind of composition

the time dimension is frequently treated as being the most important, the spatial dimension next most important, and the activity dimension somewhat less important. For a typical narrative the afternoon would be divided into four or five consecutive segments. The amount of detail given the spatial dimension would depend on the amount of movement between time segments and the amount of movement within each segment.

The appropriateness of a specific extent of coverage can be evaluated by asking:

1. Are the dimensions to be discussed clear?
2. Is the amount of detail reasonable in light of the audience, topic,[4] and purpose?
    a. Is the detail sufficient?
    b. Is the detail necessary?
        1) Is there redundant material?
        2) Is there extraneous material?

In realistic situations, one or more of purpose, topic, audience, and some portions of extent of coverage are fixed for the author very early (by higher authority or by inclination, for example) and he need only make explicit decisions about the remainder. Inexperienced authors may not realize that the decisions do in fact have to be made on these matters. When this happens, composition can be expected which have no clear purpose or topic or extent of coverage, or which contain unexpected

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[4]It is possible to consider the topic as a first approximation to the extent of coverage.

shifts in the assumptions about the audience's background. One useful goal for a composition skills program would be to train students to give explicit attention to these factors.

A typical failing of school writing assignments is that the audience and purpose are not stated. As a result the audience is usually taken to be someone like the teacher but with a curiously mottled knowledge of the topic--sometimes highly sophisticated and sometimes quite naive. This is not a type of audience likely to occur in the "real world." On the other hand, the audience is sometimes taken to be the teacher. In this case, the writer is forced to assume that the audience is considerably more knowledgeable about the topic than he is. In this situation the number of potential purposes for writing the composition becomes unrealistically small. Such problems can be avoided simply by suggesting a small range of possible audiences and purposes when making an assignment.

Another decision which should be made relatively early is the nature of the sources to be used. In particular, it must be determined whether a given composition is to be fiction or nonfiction. The sources may be consulted at any stage in the production of a composition. The nature of this consultation will, of course, differ considerably depending on the nature of the sources. Although it may not be necessary to give explicit instruction about sources at the primary level, it would appear important that the teacher or program developer make explicit his decisions on what sources should be available to the writer.

Sources for nonfiction may include references, personal observation, and logical inferences. Sources for fiction may include imagination and personal tastes about the way the elements of the topic interrelate as well as the sources which are available for nonfiction.

Category 2: Planning. At least three decisions must be made at the planning stage:

1. What is the form of the composition?
2. What is the framework or structure to be used?
3. From what viewpoint is the composition to be written?[5]

Possible forms are novels, poems, essays, letters, abstracts, and plot summaries. One can ask of a form whether it is appropriate given the topic, purpose, and audience. Notice, however, that although conceptualization decisions partially determine the planning decisions, planning decisions such as choice of form do not determine the conceptualization decisions such as choice of audience or extent of coverage.

Framework refers to the structure of a composition or a portion of a composition. A framework is appropriate if it facilitates the purpose of a composition. Thus, it is usually appropriate to choose an analytic framework (e.g., statement of problem--general solution--details of solution--implications--remaining problems) for planning and analyzing. The list of possible framework is, of course, open-ended. A small number of classes of frameworks have proven

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[5]Some rhetoricans discuss the emotional commitment or stance which the writer adopts. These could be considered parts of viewpoint or separate concepts if so desired.

valuable and recur many times. A reasonable goal for any composition program would be for students to be able to use some of the more popular examples of these classes. Some frequent classes are: report structure (e.g., introduction--purpose--method--results--decision--conclusions), deductive argument (e.g., hypotheses--premises--argument--conclusion), inductive argument (e.g., examples--generalizations--implications), narrative (e.g., yesterday--this morning--this afternoon--tonight).

These classes, as well as the other frameworks which have been examined, appear to be describable in terms of a very small number of generalized frameworks which are recursively embeddable in each other. Four generalized frameworks appear to be necessary:

1. Introduction--statement--detail--conclusion (whole-part)
2. Introduction--detail--general statement--conclusion (part-whole)
3. Introduction--list--conclusion
    a. Naturally ordered
    b. Permuted order
4. Introduction--problem--solution--conclusion

In each case the introduction and conclusion are optional. When one of these generalized frameworks is embedded in another, the introduction or conclusion may function as transitions between portions of the compositions. Embedded conclusions may also occur as true conclusions for portions of compositions.

As an example of the analysis of a specific framework in terms of the three generalized frameworks, consider one common post-

Aristotelian Roman system for arranging a composition.[6]

1. The introduction
2. The exposition of the case or problem
3. The steps of the argument
4. The proof
5. The refutation of opposing arguments
6. The conclusion

This framework may be considered to have two levels of embedded frameworks within one matrix framework. The matrix framework (indicated below by Roman numerals) is the whole-part framework, the first level of embedding (indicated by capital letters) contains what amount to two lists (the arguments for and the refutation of the arguments against), and the second level of embedding (indicated by Arabic numerals) again represents the whole-part framework.

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[6]Interest in effective frameworks dates back at least to Corax of Syracuse (446 B.C.) who prepared a list of Techne which apparently were types of arguments he found useful as a lawyer. Plato rebelled against Corax's willingness to ignore the truth in the interest of persuasion, and developed his techniques for leading people to truth. Aristotle managed a partial synthesis of the persuasive and truth seeking aspects of composition, and developed a list of frameworks (topoi, literally "topics") including: by definition, by cause and effect, and by comparison and contrast. Modern rhetoricians trace their art back to Aristotle and his students (see Gorrell, 1971; West, 1971).

GENERALIZED FRAMEWORK	ROMAN SYSTEM
I. Introduction	(1) Introduction
II. Statement	(2) Exposition of the case or problem
III. Detail	
A. List 1	
1. Statement	(3) Steps in the argument
2. Detail	(4) The proof
B. List 2	(5) Refutation of opposing arguments
1. Statement	(5a) Describe argument
2. Detail	(5b) Rebut argument
IV. Conclusion	(6) Conclusion

Examples of whole-part frameworks are deductive arguments, descriptions, comparison and contrast, and report structure. Examples of part-whole frameworks include inductive arguments and mathematical discussions which begin with axiomatic statements and definitions, prove preliminary theorems, and finaliy prove one or more major theorems. List frameworks may be based on a time dimension (e.g., narratives), spatial dimensions of one sort or another, alphabetic order, numerical size (e.g., by population, acres, budget, height, etc.), or by judgements of importance (arguments). A narrative which makes use of flashbacks is an example of a list which has had its natural order permuted. A lawyer who decides to give his second strongest argument first and save his strongest argument for last is also making use of a permuted list framework.

Plot development provides an example of the problem-solution framework. The setting, conflict, climax, and resolution correspond to the introduction, problem, solution, and conclusion, respectively.

Although the audience for the different portions of a composition is typically the same as the audience for the entire composition, the subpurposes associated with different sections of a composition are not necessarily identical to each other or to the purpose of the entire composition. For this reason, sections of a composition may not have parallel frameworks.

Frameworks are forms without substance. They are characteristics of every composition and need not be stated explicitly to exist.[7] An outline, on the other hand, is the result of embedding a topic in a chosen framework. An outline is appropriate with respect to the conceptualization decisions to the extent that it embodies the extent of coverage decided upon at the conceptualization stage. To the extent that it brings in irrelevant matters, omits portions of dimensions to be covered, or gives lesser ranked dimensions more promience than has been planned, an outline is inappropriate.

Viewpoint includes the traditional categories of point of view (omniscient observer, first person, etc.) and grammatical person of the narrator as well as what might be termed the vantage point. (The history of Rome as seen by a Roman senator.) Choices of viewpoint are naturally constrained by choices of topic, audience, purpose, product, and framework.

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[7]It may be useful to define a null framework in order to allow a description of amorphous compositions in the same terms as other compositions. An alternative would be to consider amorphous compositions as have a list framework with a list based on a set which lacks either coherence or a clear ordering.

The title is sometimes chosen when planning, although it is possible to decide upon it at any point. It seems clear that different types of titles are appropriate for different types of products. In general, it is possible to ask whether a proposed title (1) accurately reflects the purpose, topic, and extent of coverage of a composition, and (2) is it likely to gain the attention and interest of the proposed audience.

Category 3: Writing. The acutal writing of the composition can be conceived of as finding appropriate syntactic structures and vocabulary to express the underlying concepts embodied in the framework (or outline). Most of this work is presumably undertaken in accordance with whatever strategies the writer has developed for formulating ideas as speech. The performance constraints on both speech production and writing production are not known. It is clear, however, that written production is to some extent filtered through spelling ability and punctuation conventions. For example, it is often the case that a child cannot spell a word. When this happens, it seems likely that he will use an alternative word if he knows one. In some instances, using an alternative word requires revising the syntactic structure.

While simultaneous monitoring of production happens in both speaking and writing, the writer has the opportunity and the need to pay closer attention to such matters as:

1. The background information available to his audience.
2. The sensibilities and expectations of his audience with respect to such relatively minor matters as

a. word choice (there may be both specialized exclusions and inclusions of key words for a given audience, topic, purpose, and product), and

b. syntactic choice (there may be both specialized exclusions and inclusions here as well as in word choice).

3. Transitions between portions of the composition.

When the writer has alternative choices of syntax or lexicon, stylistic considerations come into play. Style decisions are implemented at the writing stage, although overall style decisions may be made at some point in the conceptualization or planning of the composition. Style choices can occur in all areas of language: phonology choices can involve alliteration, rhyme, meter, short sentences vs. long sentences, and stress placement; syntactic choices can be made between simple sentences vs. multiply embedded sentences, between straight-forward word order (unmarked work order) vs. convoluted word order (marked word order) or between use of active sentences vs. passive sentences; semantic choices involve matters of reference, coreference, anaphora, metaphor, similes, hyperboles, other figures of speech, selectional restrictions, and presupposition; formality choices involve questions of colloquial vs. formal vocabulary, the relative frequency of complex sentences, and possibly the relative frequency of the use of idioms.

Stylistic choices can be evaluated on how well they emphasize the topic (of the composition or portion of the composition), or on whether they detract from the topic. They can also be evaluated on whether they are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and form. Considerations of appropriateness with respect to form vary in

importance depending on the form chosen and the dogmatism of the critic. For instance it is important to include seventeen syllables in every haiku, but some critics will allow variations from the 5-7-5 foot pattern while others will not.

The overall quality of the writing of a composition can be evaluated by noting whether all the points mentioned in the framework and the extent of coverage have been covered; and whether each dimension has been given an appropriate weight. To the extent that this is not so or extraneous matter has been brought in, the writing of the composition can be judged inappropriate. If an outline is available, the composition can be judged by how closely it matches the outline in the ordering of the points as well as in content. If the outline is appropriate to the framework and Category 1 decisions, there may be no need to measure the writing directly against the Category 1 decisions. The writing can also be judged as to whether the background and sensibilities of the presumed audience have been sufficiently heeded, and whether the style decisions are appropriate.

Category 4: Editing and revising. Editing can be conceived of as post-monitoring. It differs from monitoring in that it happens after the composition (or section of the composition) is written. Editing can be further broken down into three subcategories:

1. proof reading
2. copy editing
3. conceptual editing

Proof reading deals with spelling and punctuation and is relatively independent of meaning. Copy editing considers whether

the composition as a whole is clearly a unit, whether the composition and its parts are coherent, and whether the transitions from one portion of a composition to another are appropriate. Copy editing also involves a review of the appropriateness of the relative weightings of the sections of the composition, consistency with the conceptualization and planning decisions, overall stylistic unity, and all of the considerations mentioned in the discussion of monitoring and style in Category 3, writing.

When proof reading exposes an error, the composition is revised by cycling back through the final mechanical stages (typing, hand lettering, printing). When copy editing exposes an error, the composition or portion of the composition is recycled to the writing stage.

Conceptual editing reviews the appropriateness of the final product for the original purpose, topic, audience, and extent of coverage with an eye to modifying the specifications of those items. If any modifications appear desirable, it is necessary to recycle the appropriate parts of the composition through the planning stage and subsequent writing and editing stages. It is also possible to review the various planning decisions after a draft composition has been completed, and to recycle through the planning stage if it appears desirable to modify the original planning decisions while maintaining the conceptualization decisions unchanged.

IMPLICATIONS

The network of compositional concepts presented above is clearly a proper subset of the set of communication concepts. It seems likely that with some modifications and the addition of a few additional concepts an expanded conceptual network could be devised to form the basis for a unified analysis of composition, drama, and reading. Besides analyzing verbal forms of communication it should also be possible to extend this conceptual network to a network covering all forms of communication including such nonverbal and multimodal forms as music, art, and the dance.[8]

In order to test the limits of the present network of compositions and to begin the work of expanding it, the literatures on rhetoric, composition, and criticism (both literary and nonliterary) should be examined. An additional test of the robustness of this network would be to probe for its weak points by attempting to analyze nonverbal forms of communication in the terms presented above. Furthermore, if these concepts have behavioral relevance, it should be possible to relate them to cognitive processes described in psychological terms and to examine them experimentally.

Immediate tests of the behavioral relevance of this conceptual network can come from attempting to utilize it in at least three ways. Firstly, it may be used as a hierarchically ordered inventory of subject matter to be considered for inclusion in a composition

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[8]For an instance of the application of some similar concepts to an analysis of the classical European clown act see Bouissac (1972).

skills curriculum. As such, it can provide one basis for a rationale for specific choices of instructional content.[9] It can also form a basis for decisions on the sequential ordering of specified content. In addition, it should provide one set of criteria for assigning relative weights to given subtopics within an instructional system.

Secondly, the conceptual network presented above can be used by both teachers and curriculum planners as a check list of points to be considered in giving assignments to students. For example, even if the types of audience a writer is likely to encounter are not included as a topic in a curriculum, it is important that each writing assignment specify who the audience is.

A third application of these compositional concepts is as a common vocabulary for discussing a class of objects--communications--frequently encountered in both the world at large and in education in particular. Indeed, the test of the value of these concepts is whether they prove to have behavioral relevance not only in planning instruction but in practicing the various kinds of communicational acts that people regularly engage in.

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[9]It is quite clear that a theoretical formulation such as this one cannot form the sole basis for such rationales. Practical matters such as the entry skills students can be expected to have must also be taken into consideration.

APPENDIX

CONCEPTUALIZATION: Decisions

1. Purpose
   a. social interchange
   b. recreation
   c. recording
   d. persuasion
2. Topic
3. Audience
4. Extent of Coverage
   a. dimensions covered
   b. relative importance of dimensions
   c. bounds on each dimension
   d. amount of detail for each dimension
5. Sources
   a. fiction
   b. nonfiction

PLANNING: Decisions

1. Form

   a. novel

   b. poem

   c. essay

   d. letter

   e. abstract

   f. plot summary

2. Generalized Framework

   a. introduction-statement-detail-conclusion (whole-part)

   b. introduction-detail-statement-conclusion (part-whole)

   c. introduction-list-conclusion

      1) naturally ordered
      2) permuted order

   d. introduction-problem-solution-conclusion

3. Viewpoint

   a. point of view

      1) first person
      2) second person
      3) third person

   b. vantage point

   c. emotional commitment (stance)

4. Title

WRITING: Events

1. Writing
   a. syntax
   b. vocabulary

2. Monitoring
   a. background
   b. syntax
   c. vocabulary
   d. transition

3. Style Choices
   a. phonology
   b. syntax
   c. semantics
   d. formality

EDITING: Events

1. Proof Reading (revision)
   a. spelling
   b. punctuation

2. Copy Editing (recycling)
   a. weighting of parts
   b. unity of whole
   c. transitions

3. Conceptual Editing (recycling)
   a. purpose
   b. topic
   c. audience
   d. extent of coverage

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